



Teton Valley
Health
Where Everyone Matters

Press Release – For Immediate Release

COVID-19 Update Thursday, October 8, 2020 7:00 pm

- **Board of Health modifies response plan: extends time period for moving to lower risk level; strips out most mitigation measures, moves responsibility to local governments and individuals**
- **Madison County now at high risk level, but with no additional restrictions**
- **Eastern Idaho regional hospitals' ongoing staffing, capacity worries**
- **St. John's Hospital in Jackson also facing staffing stress, Living Center Outbreak**
- **Teton School District 401 update**

EIPH'S Board Modifies COVID-19 Regional Response Plan; Encourages More Personal Accountability; Madison County Moves to High Risk; Public Health Orders for Required Masking and Event Guidance Still in Place

(SE Idaho) – The Board of Health (BOH) at Eastern Idaho Public Health (EIPH) met this morning (October 8) and made modifications to the COVID-19 Regional Response Plan. When the Plan was developed back in July, the key risk reduction strategies of staying home when sick and monitoring your health, washing hands or using hand sanitizer, maintaining physical distance of at least 6 feet from others, and wearing a face covering when not able to physically distance, were the backbone of the plan. “We believe that if these four mitigation strategies are done consistently, we would see a decrease in cases of COVID-19, less hospitalizations, and ultimately, less deaths. Our concern right now is the increase in hospitalizations that we are experiencing in our region. We want individuals to make choices consistent with public health recommendations to slow the spread of the virus and reverse this concerning trend,” stated Geri Rackow, EIPH Director.

These four strategies will continue to be the basis of each risk level in the plan. The Board chose to eliminate many of the unenforceable mitigation strategies and instead plan to focus its efforts on promoting and providing additional education on the everyday strategies people can adopt and follow that will help to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. ***Two mitigation measures that will remain in the plan are Health Orders requiring face coverings and limitations on social gatherings and events outside of the Minimal (green) Risk Level. This is because***

COVID-19 RISK LEVELS			
MINIMAL RISK	MODERATE RISK	HIGH RISK	CRITICAL RISK
Clark County	Bonneville County Custer County Fremont County Jefferson County Lemhi County Teton County	Madison County	
GUIDANCE English Español			

EIPH COVID-19 Cases

County	Today's Cases	Total Cases	Active Cases**	Active Rate Per 10K	Deaths
Bonneville*	37	3244	232	19.5	20
Clark*	0	38	3	35.5	0
Custer*	0	73	2	4.6	1
Fremont*	0	285	16	12.2	3
Jefferson*	9	708	53	17.7	3
Lemhi*	6	132	21	26.2	0
Madison*	27	1294	218	54.6	2
Teton*	4	222	16	13.2	1
Total	83	5996	561	24.7	30

Data Updated 10/8/2020 6:04:11 PM

these are two proven public health strategies that can help slow the spread of the virus.

The BOH and EIPH also feel it is imperative for local elected officials and school and community leaders to expand their role in helping their cities and counties reduce the spread of COVID-19 to protect the limited healthcare resources in our communities and region. EIPH will continue to collaborate with leaders to assist them in these efforts.

The metrics (active cases/10,000 population) to elevate a county to the Moderate (yellow) Risk Level will remain the same and are based on the expected number of COVID-19 hospitalizations that result when cases reach that level. For an individual county to be elevated to the High (orange) Risk Level, the rate of active cases/10,000 population has been reduced from 50 to 30. For the region, we are currently at 27.3 active case/10,000 population which has resulted in increased hospitalizations and is placing an increasing burden on our hospitals and healthcare systems. When healthcare systems are stressed, it affects not only COVID-19 patients but all people seeking higher levels of medical care. Following the four key risk reduction strategies will reduce the impact on hospitals and help them continue to provide the medical care we have become accustomed to in our region.

Due to their dramatic increase in COVID-19 cases, Madison County has been elevated to the High (orange) Risk Level. Escalation to this level serves as a warning that the situation is becoming more serious and if a person hasn't adopted the four key risk reduction strategies, now would be a great time to start.

For a more detailed discussion on the thought process behind these decisions, please view the October 8, 2020 BOH meeting on EIPH's YouTube Channel. The revised EIPH COVID-19 Regional Response Plan will be available on our website by next week.

Current COVID-19 active and total case counts, details on all cases, and much more, can be found on our website and dashboard at www.EIPH.Idaho.gov. EIPH also has a COVID-19 call center to answer questions. Call 208-522-0310 or toll free at 855-533-3160. The call center is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. In addition, questions can be submitted via email to COVIDQuestions@eiph.idaho.gov or asked through our Facebook page at [@EIPH.Idaho](https://www.facebook.com/EIPH.Idaho).

Regional hospital capacity and staffing issues

At the October 8 EIPH / BOH meeting, regional hospital administrators again reported increasing worries over bed capacity and staffing resources in light of the recent surge in COVID hospitalizations.

David Hoffenberg, Chief Operation Officer for East Idaho Regional Medical Center (EIRMC), reported that as of last week's BOH meeting, the hospital had 21 COVID patents, but then admitted 7 new cases Thursday night, and had as many as 31 COVID patients over the weekend. The ICU was at full capacity for eight to ten hours. There are currently a total of 26 COVID inpatients, 6 of whom are in the ICU, 4 of those on ventilators. Roughly a third of all ICU beds are occupied by COVID patients. "We are nervous, we hope that this is a blip and was a one-time jump in cases and we don't see a sustained, continued growth, because that would strain our resources to the point where we would be in a tough position as a facility," he said. "There was a point this last weekend," Hoffenberg continued, "where almost every ICU bed in the region was filled, and that is not a position anybody wants to be in. As one of the larger facilities, we have to keep our beds open and available for patients from Jackson, from Teton Valley, from Salmon, Idaho, because if we can't care for them, they have to go hours and hours away from their family and their communities to get the level of care that they need."

Idaho Community Hospital CEO Casey Jackman reported 17 COVID patients currently, with 5 in the ICU, all on ventilators. He said over the weekend, as EIRMC experienced its peak surge, his hospital had one available ICU bed, meaning that there was one ICU bed available in all of Idaho Falls, for any kind of patient. Jackman indicated a COVID patient is currently under comfort care, and likely to pass away within the next 12 to 24 hours.

Jackman pointedly said health officials should be worried about staffing capacity, as opposed to just bed space. "We've been collecting data since COVID started, and one of the things the government asked for is 'how many open beds do you have?' and I think one of the more accurate pieces of data that they should have been collecting, and that we should have

been collecting all along is ‘how many patients can you take care of?’” Jackman also lamented the lack of public compliance with COVID precautions, saying such behavior will ensure that he and his colleagues will “stay busy.”

Kevin McEwan, Chief Nursing Officer for Madison Memorial Hospital in Rexburg, reported 6 COVID patients with 1 in the ICU, ages ranging from 38 to 83. He said the facility has a surge capacity up to 12 beds, but reiterated his colleagues’ point that their biggest limitation is adequate staff. He said nursing, pharmacy, physical therapy and lab staff are feeling “COVID fatigue.”

St. John’s Hospital in Jackson

Not discussed at the BOH meeting, but still relevant to Teton County, are reports of a COVID outbreak at St. John’s Health Living Center, an assisted living facility for the elderly, attached to St. John’s Hospital in Jackson, WY. The Jackson Hole News and Guide reported Wednesday that eight residents and three staff members have tested positive for COVID-19. All eight residents were transferred from the Living Center to the acute care side of the hospital, which is short more than 20 staff due to positive COVID tests or quarantine. As of October 8, the Teton County, WY COVID-19 dashboard showed 55 active cases and 189 people under quarantine.

Teton School District 410 update

On Wednesday, October 7, TSD 401 reported one additional possible COVID exposure to students at both Rendezvous and Victor Elementary; two exposures and one positive case at Teton High; four possible exposures to students at Driggs Elementary; and one positive case and four possible exposures to students Teton Middle Middle School. Basin High is the only district school -- along with the district’s youngest students, in its Pre-K classes -- that have not yet had a COVID-related incident.

Since school began, there are a total of 24 positive cases and 139 possible exposures of students and staff.

Whenever TSD is notified about a positive case, whether by self-reporting or from EIPH, the school’s principal notifies other administrators if the family includes siblings and pursues contacting all parents of students who may have been in close contact with that person. Notification letters are sent to all parents when there is a report of a positive case or exposure, and a status update of each weekday’s incidents is circulated to district staff and other educators in Teton Valley.

The 14-day quarantine for the three classes at Driggs Elementary that began Sept. 23 and Sept. 24 is now completed and those students are returning to school if they are still symptom-free.

Sign up for Community update emails

To subscribe to Community COVID-19 update emails, [click here](#).

You can also get current COVID information, including links to a variety of pandemic-related resources, by going to Teton County’s COVID-19 Information hub at: <https://coronavirus-response-tetonidaho.hub.arcgis.com/>.